The Afghans in North Bihar

Rabindra Nath Chaudhary

The Afghans were courageous, intractable and vindictive.[1] They were endowed with brilliant fighting qualities and a genius for military organization. They were dreaded and their various tribes like the Nuhanis and Kararanis exercised their sway with fluctrating fortunes, over a large part of Bihar.[2]

The Afghans had a strong belt of influence in Mithila. The Kararanis, one of the principal branches of the pathans,[3] were originally the inhabitants of Eastern Tirhut or Mithila and it is from here that they took upon themselves the task of reorganizing the Afghans against the authority of Delhi. In other words, the Kararani Afghans were the undisputed master of Bengal and Bihar upto 1572 A. D.[4] when Daud Kararani raised the banner of revolt against the Mughal imperial authority, several Afghan families who had already settled in Mithila swelled his forces. This is corroborated by Mulla Taquia.[5]. Although Daud was able to mobilise a large army, the Mughals ultimately came out victorious.

The Afghan rebellions were a regular feature in Mithila and they often created a difficult situation for the administration. It was the Afghan rising which according to some traditional account[6] prompted the Mughal Emperor Akbar to bestow the Zamindari of Mithila to Mahesh Thakur, the founder of

---

1 Yusuf Ali Khan, *Yusuf-Ahwal-l-Alivardi Khan*, folio 50 quoted in Dutta, K. K. *Alivardi and His times*, Chap. IV, pp. 119 20.

2 Diwakar, R. R., *Bihar through the Ages*, Chap. XV, p. 477.

3 Rose, Glossary, Vol. II. p. 476; *Makhzan-i-Afgani* (Trans. by Dorn), Vol. II, pp. 54-56. Their home was in Bangash, modern Kurram, see also Chaudhary R. K., *History of Muslim Rule in Tirhut*; p. 117.

4 *Riyaz-us-salatin*, p. 153

5 Chaudhary, R. K. *op. cit.*, Chap. IV, p. 125.

6 Singh, S. N., *History of Tirhut*, p. 214

the Khandavala dynasty with the expectation that the man of the soil would easily collect the taxes and maintain the law and order in that part of the country. R. K. Chaudhary says that Gopal (Perhaps Gopal Thakur of the Khandavala dynasty) was one of the assistants of Khan Jahan who had reorganised the Bihar army under the instigation of Hussain Quli Khan whom Akbar had entrusted with the task of tackling the problem of the Afghan rising in Bihar. It was perhaps in recognition of his services to the Mughal army in suppressing the revolt and bringing about peace and stability in Mithila that Akbar made a fresh grant to Gopal Thakur with certain specification of his rights and duties.[7]

With the restoration of the Mughals under Akbar Bihar was for the first time organised into a separate Sarkar of Akbar's Empire in 1575-76 A. D. Darbhanga was a Mahal in Mithila and the Khandavala chiefs were able to suppress the rebellions of the Afghans in the region and bring them under the complete subjugation. Since then the Afghans were employed in the service of the Khandavala chiefs and they settled in Darbhanga in large numbers. The Riyaz-us-Salatin and Siyar-ut-Mutakherin say that Alivardi admitted into his service Abdul Karim Khan, a powerful Rahala Afghan chief with fifteen hundred Darbhanga Afghans under his command. Besides the famous Afghan chief, Sardar Khan was in the service of Raghava Singh, the Khandavala chief. Local traditions also affirm that during the reign of Raghava Singh, Nawab Zaimddin Ahmad Khan came to Mithila and stayed at the village Bhaura, the then capital of the Khandavalas[8].

After the death of Aurangzeb, the region of Mithila was badly disturbed by the activities of the Banjaras. In the garb of peaceful traders and travellers, they plundered the area right and left. We learn from the Muzaffarnama that the Banjaras of Mahal Bettiah frequented the regions of Oudh, Gorakhpur, Ghazipur, Bettiah and Bhaura (in Mithila). It is also said that Bhaura was their special jagir, with 80,000 horses and a lac of

7 Chaudhary, R. K., 'The Khandavalas of Mithila,' *JBRS*, Vol. XLVIII, section II, p. 46

8 Bihari Lal, *Ain-I-Tirhut*, p. 32

oxen. On the pretext of buying and selling their animals they created disturbances everywhere in the region. Thus with the help of the Darbhanga Afghans some of whom were in the service of Raghava Singh, the Khandavala chief Alivardi succeeded in driving out the Banjaras and got an immense booty from them.[9] It is said that Abdul Karim Khan was one of the greatest heroes of the time[10] and on hearing the name of Karim Khan, the Banjaras fled to the hills of Makwani (Nepal Tarai) which was famous for its strength. Karim Khan was halped by the Raja of Bettiah in his mission. Besides the Khandavala chief, Raghava singh of Darbhanga also fought war against this Makwani ruler with the help of the well known Afghan commander, Sardar Khan.[11]

Later Karim Khan deserted Alivardi and began to make ambitious plans. Apprehending that the example of the Afghan commander, Karim Khan, might breed infection among others to the prejudice of his government, Alivardi got him murdered through a clever device when he attended the "Chihil Satun" or "Hall of Audience" at Patna.[12] Thus ended the life of one of the braver Afghans of Darbhanga and soldiers of his age, whose ambition Alivardi could not tolerate for good just after the work of suppressing the Banjaras had been achieved.

However, the Afghans were the soul of the army of Alivardi with whose help he had succeeded not only in suppressing the rebel Zamindars of Bihar but also in stabilising his power in his early years.

Ghulam Mustafa Hussain Khan was the foremost of his Afghan officers. Mustafa's personal achievement in defeating the first year's Maratha raid and his successful camp in destroying Bhaskar in the third year had raised him almost to a position of equality with Alivardi. His reputation as a brave man and veteran general was unrivalled. He had gathered under his own com-

9 *Suyur-ul-Mutakhorin*, Vol. 11, p. 47?, *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, p. 296.

10 Jadunath Sarkar (tr), *Muzaffarnama, Bengal past and present* LXVI, pp. 68–69.

11 An account of this contest is found in a book-of poetery, entilted-*Raghava-Vijayawali*, Raj Press, 1328 Fasli, p. 4. We also get an account of Sardar Khan's bravery in it.

12 *Riyaz-us saltin*, p. 297; *Siyur-ul-Mutakhorin*, Vol. 11, p. 473.

mand a compact body of 9,000 Afghan horsemen besides a force of infantry. His armed strength, capacity and ambition made him a formidble danger to the Nawab's throne.[13]

It is said that Alivardi in his hour of sore need had promised Mustafa Hussain Khan the Governorship of Bengal as his reward if he could murder Bhaskar, but he now shrank from the fulfilment of his promise. Mustafa was angry at this breach of faith and as such an armed conflict between the two became imminent.[14] Mustafa Khan resigned the service of the Nawab with a body of 9,000 Afghan horsemen and a powerful infantry.[15] He pressed his demand for the Deputy Governorship of Bihar and also claimed the arrear pay of soldiers amounting to seventeen lacs of rupees. The Nawab soon paid the amount but did not offer the Deputy Governorship. Consequently, Mustafa tried to unite all the Afghan Sardars in his favour to oust Alivardi from the Governmentship. But Shamshir Khan and Sardar Khan did not join with Mustafa and secretly deceived him as they were won over by Alivardi's gold and favours.[16] Similarly, the Afghan generals Umar Khan and Raham Khan also remained indifferent towards Mustafa and as such the Afghan disunion was a good stroke of fortune for Alivardi who dismissed Mustafa Khan Baharjang.[17]

Mustafa Khan started for Patna towards the end of February 1745 with a large army. On his way at Rajmahal, he seized some elephants, guns and ammunitions belonging to the Nawab.[18] His nephew, Abdul Rasul Khan, the Deputy Governor of Orissa, also joined him there. After that he came over to Monghyr and bessezed the fort and captured the Nawab's officer Hussain Beg Khan with his three sons. Thereafter he marched towards Patna with 15000 cavalry.

13 Sarkar, Jadunath, *Bihar and Orisa-During the fall of the Mughal Empire*, with a detailed study of the Marathas in Bengal and Orisa, Patna 'Varsity Readership lecturs, 1931, Patna' Varsity Patna 1932, pp. 61-62

14 Sarkar, Jadunath, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, II, pp. 112-13

15 *Yusuf*, folio, 50 Quoted in Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 120

16 *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, Vol. II p. 533, *Muzaffarnama*, f. 613, *Yusuf* folio, 52

17 *Bengal past and present*, LXVII, p. 12

18 *Siyar*, Vol. II, p. 533, *Muzaffarnama*, f. 62B (Also quoted in Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 122

Zainuddin Haibatjang was at that time staying in Mahal Bhauwara[19] or Bhaura of Sarkar Tirhut. He had been secretly instructed by Alivardi to avoid an encounter with Mustafa. But Zainuddin ignored his advice and moved from Tirhut to Patna or Azimabad.[20] Entrenching himself in Jafar Khan's garden he began to make preparations for resisting the advance of Mustafa. He succeeded in enlisting the support of many powerful Zamindars of the province such as Raja Sundar Singh of Tekari, Kamgar of Maji of Narhat-Samai, Bishen Singh of Serescotomba, Pahalwan Singh and Surtur Singh of Sasaram and Chainpur, Buhrut Singh of Arval, Ajit Shah and Kesho Shah of Narhan and Narendra Singh of Darbhanga. They joined him with their forces against the Afghan Mustafa Khan.[21]

Zainuddin had secured the help of Raghava Singh against the Afghans and it was for this purpose that the former had gone to Bhauwara.[22] Further during the life-time of Raghava Singh Narendra Singh helped Zainuddin against the Afghans and the part played by Raghava Singh in bringing victory to the Nawab elicited a poet's appreciation.[23] Ilyas Rahman[24] says that "during the time of this Raja [Narendra Singh] Nawab Zainuddin Ahmad Khan Haibatjang Bahadur (1740–48), the then Lieutenant Governor of Bihar, obtained the whole of Sarkar Tirhut in 1743 as a Jagir from the Emperor Mohammad Shah and left Patna for Tirhut accompained by Mehdi Nasar Khan and others for the management of his Jagir and to populate the *paraganas*. The Nawab camped at Bhauwara, the capital city of the Raja and deputed his comrades in several *paraganas* for the tasks specified. The Nawab

19 *Muzaffarnama*, f. 62 A, *Ibid.* p. 122

20 *Bengal past and present*, LXVII, p. 13, cf *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* (Raymen) i, 447

21 Jha Mukund Bakshi, *Mithila Bhashamaya Itihasa*, p. 184

22 Chaudary, R. K., "The Khandavalas of Mithila", *JBRS*, Vol. ALVIII part 1-4, sec II, p. 53

23 Jha, Mukund Bakshi; *op. cit.*, pp. 184–85, cf. Singh, S. N., *op. cit.*, p. 221

24 Rahmani Ilyas, *History of Land Revenue in Mithila*, p. 13 (unpublished).

25 Chaudhary, R. K., "The Khandavalas of Mithila", *JBRS*, Vol. XLIII part 1-4, Sec ii, p. 53

26 Jha, Mukund Bakshi, *op. cit.*, pp. 184–85, cf. Singh, S. N. *op. cit.*, p. 221

stationed there for more than two years and built many residential palaces, etc. there; and called up eventually his wife, Amina Begam with her children and personal staff and undertook the management of his *jagir* very carefully. However, two years later, he had to go Patna to subdue the General Mustafa Khan Babarjang in 1746. The Raja also had gone accompanied by the Nawab and taken the field in person."[28]

Thus it appears that Zainuddin in his compaign against Mustafa Khan Babarjang secured the help of Narendra Singh, the Khandavala Chief of Darbhanga and succeeded in defeating and killing him. However in 1745, the defeated Afghans appealed to Raghuji Bhonsle for help.[29] Raghuji agreed to help the afghans and succeeded in weaning away many Afghan Sardars from Alivardi. As a result, in November, 1745, Alivardi was deprived of the help of Afghan generals, like Shamshir Khan and Sardar Khan, who entered into an agreement with Raghuji to share the Government of Bengal with him against Alivardi. In June 1746, they were dismissed by Alivardi and as such they returned to Darbhanga with their six thousand men. Their dismissal, however, did not mean the end of the Afghan trouble in Bihar.

The Afghan trouble cropped up again when Zainuddin Haibatjang with collaboration and help of Darbhanga Afghans, Shamshir Khan and Sardar Khan, began to conceive plans of becoming independent[30] and sieze the *masnad* of Bengal. To win the Darbhanga Afghans he wrote to Alivardi to take them back in service as they were expert soldiers. He even sent Aga Azim Taqui Quli Khan aud Askar Khan to the Afghan at Darbhanga inviting them to come to Patna for service. Consequently Shamshir Khan, Murad Khan, Sardar Khan and Bakshi Bahelia left Darbhanga and reached Patna via Hajipur. But on the day of the interview scheduled in the Audience Hall Zainuddin was murdered by the Afghans.

---

27 Rahmani Ilyas, *History of Land Revenue in Mithila*, p. 13 (unpublished)

28 *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, part 11, pp. 527-528.

29. Mashir (1946); cf. *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, Vol. 11, p. 545 cf. *Siyar* (Raymond) Vol. ii, p. 29.

30 *Siyar* (Raymond), Vol. 11, pp. 29-30.

The Afghans usurped all powers and Alivardi lost his control over Patna for a period of full three months. Bihar now tasted the Afghan rule in its naked form which brought untold miseries on the people and the city was subjected to indiscriminate plundering by the Afghans which is perhaps unsurpassed by any other raids and plunders.[31]

The Marathas also joined the fray on behalf of the Afghan Sardars. But Alivardi met their joint forces near Rani Sarai, close to Monghyr, and thoroughly defeated them and their leaders Shamshir Khan and others were killed. He further sent his trusted officers to confiscate and bring away the property which the Afghans had left at Darbhanga. However, it must be said to the credit of Alivardi that he did not misbehave and ill-treat the women and children of Shamshir Khan then living under the portection of the Bettiah Raja who requested the Nawab to let him go away to some other place. In fact, the Nawab treated them with kindness and due respect making all suitable provisions for their ease and comforts.[32] Not only this he got the daughter of Shamshir Khan married to an Afghan of noble birth, named Shah Muhammad Ishaque with the consent of her relatives and permitted them along with the widow of Shamshir Khan to return to Darbhanga where some villages were also granted to them for their maintenance.[33] Sirajuddaullah[34] wanted to take the daughter of Shamshir Khan into his harem and therefore Alivardi called her his own daughter and treated her as such. Thereafter, Alivardi returned to Murshibabad towards the end of 1748.

Thus the Afghan bid for supremacy in Bihar was crushed and their hope of building an Afghan State was gone for good.[35]



31 Datta, K. K. *op. cit.*, p. 135

32 *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, Vol II. pp. 566–67

33 Ibid.

34 *Bengal past and present, op. cit.*, p. 19

35 Chaudhary, R. K. *History of Muslim Rule in Tirhut*, p. 208

THE JOURNAL
OF THE
BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY
L. N. MISHRA COMMEMORATION VOLUME

Vols. LXIII-LXIV 1977-1978

Chief Editor
Professor Upendra Thakur

Editor-in-Charge
Dr. K. K. Mandal



PUBLISHED BY
THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY
PATNA